E-DEMOCRACY AND E-TOOLS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION ON LOCAL LEVEL IN POLAND

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Abstract
The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) brought many changes in various areas of human life. Also, democracy is being influenced by the use of electronic communication technologies, such as the Internet. ICT's impact on democracy and participation has led to the emergence of specific tools that allow citizens to use electronic tools of political participation. The use of technology in politics is a fascinating example of interaction between technology, public policy and also public opinion. How the law and society respond to advanced technology is worthy of study, particularly in countries, where e-tools of people's participation are becoming more and more popular among certain groups of political actors. The application of information and communication technologies in political decision-making processes in Poland is relatively new phenomenon – we may say that it has been observed for not more than 15 years. This paper will analyze Polish local practices and also attitudes of the Poles towards selected e-tools of civic participation on local level. Findings presented in the article prove that it is worth to consider the implementation of new participation solutions, since the society is interested in new convenient forms of participation in public life – not only on the local level but certainly also on the state level as well.

1. Introduction

Due to a very rapid development of new information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet, for several years now, modern technologies are used in democratic governance. Undoubtedly, this translates into a new quality of political phenomena. ICT's influence on democracy and participation has led to the emergence of specific instruments that allow citizens to use electronic tools of political participation. Over the last decade we have observed a growing awareness of the need to consider the application of the ICT for participation allowing the citizens to contribute to democratic debate and to express their views in popular votes. Thus, one may state that the use of technology in decision-making processes is a fascinating example of interaction between technology, public policy and also public opinion. How the law and society respond to advanced technology is worthy of study, particularly in countries, where e-tools are becoming more and more popular among certain groups of political actors. The aim of the paper is to discuss the use of e-tools of participation on local level in Poland. This paper will analyze Polish local practices and also attitudes of the Poles towards selected e-tools of civic participation on local level.

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2. Defining e-democracy

While describing the influence of modern technologies on the democratic system, it should be emphasized that the literature presents a major diversity as regards the understanding of *electronic democracy*.

Electronic democracy is a form of democratic practice which uses new information and communication technologies. *E-democracy* enables citizens of a given country to influence political decision making through direct and indirect democracy while using modern information technologies.

A very interesting understanding of e-democracy has been presented by Tero Päivärinta and Øystein Sæbø who defined *e-democracy* as a form of using information and communication technologies (ICT) in political debates and decision making. Päivärinta and Sæbø have emphasized that, on the one hand, new (electronic) means of political activity complement traditional channels[2], and on the other, they are treated as their counterbalance [19]. Considering rapid development of ICT and their use in various fields of social life, we may conclude that the perception of new technologies as complementary to traditional forms is more appropriate in this context. This can be supported by examples of e-democracy initiatives which have become popular in recent years. Additionally, the support for electronic governance is also provided by local communities [6, 21], and international communities [4], which expresses faith that new technologies have the potential to increase the level of democracy [19].

3. E-participation and major e-participation tools

The use of ICT by public institutions does have an impact on the contemporary democracy, and new information and communication technologies may enhance the centrality of citizens in their relations with state structures. ICT are also capable of stimulating civic activity, create conditions for enhancing public debate, and reduce social and political exclusion.

Engaging citizens in policy-making is an important aspect of what is sometimes called "good government" or "citizen-centric government". The use of information and communication technologies to gather and analyze public input is expected to stimulate public deliberation.

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[2] Such as *face-to-face* or single sided media communication (e.g. radio or television).

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                                         │      Feedback       │
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Agenda setting	Designing (developing) a political approach (de___ns)	Decision-making	Implementation of a political decision	Policy evaluation

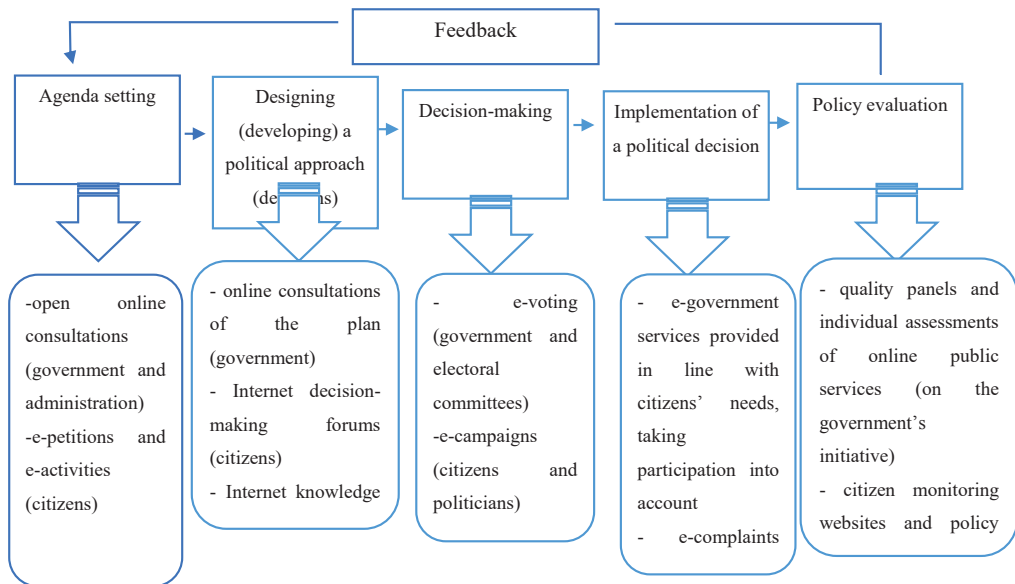| -open online consultations (government and administration) -e-petitions and e-activities (citizens) | - online consultations of the plan (government) - Internet decision-making forums (citizens) - Internet knowledge | - e-voting (government and electoral committees) -e-campaigns (citizens and politicians) | - e-government services provided in line with citizens' needs, taking participation into account - e-complaints | - quality panels and individual assessments of online public services (on the government's initiative) - citizen monitoring websites and policy |

Chart 1. Main use of e-participation tools in political process
Source: own materials based on: van Dijk, 2012.

For many theoreticians, the use of ICT for e-democracy translates into larger than previously engagement of citizens who, while having modern technologies available, may become more engaged in political processes, in particular participative democracy. However, attention should be drawn to the fact that the use of ICT in democracy changes the role of governments (limitations), and consequently increased citizen activity (direct democracy) [2]. The phenomenon of enhanced engagement of citizens in the political life through ICT has been described by Jan van Dijk, who described such civic activity as electronic participation (e-participation) [24].

Jan van Dijk defines e-participation as "*the use of digital media to mediate and transform the relations of citizens to governments and to public administrations in the direction of more participation by citizens*" [25]. While referring to specific phases of the political process, van Dijk distinguishes several e-participation forms that can be used in political decision-making. The author emphasizes that during the first phase of agenda setting, political representatives do not only inform citizens about their activity at the official government website but also invite them to express their views about on going and planned political actions. Moreover, political representatives encourage the society to present their ideas, suggest changes etc. Although provision of information is the most often used application of ICT tools, it is not sufficient to talk about e-participation. Thus, we need to add the engagement of citizens in the process. For this reason, it is becoming more popular to enable citizens to influence their legal representatives through, for instance, e-petitions[3]. Today, in the Internet Era, the technological advancement has enabled to set up online consultations, discussions at web-based forums and social media portals. Those are referred to by van Dijk as the second phase of the political process, namely drafting a decision. Suggestions and comments

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[3] Scotland is a good example of that, since citizens can fill out on-line petition forms.

expressed by attendees of electronic discussions may play an important role, inter alia, while developing final bills or detailing political agendas in a specific areas [23; 26; 1; 8].

As regards decision making and the use of ICT, two forms of participation are referred to: electronic voting (elections, referenda, opinion polls) and e-campaigning. A very good example confirming the efficiency of e-campaigning were presidential campaigns by Barack Obama. Apart from politicians, citizens too can use the potential of e-campaigning, for instance to put pressure on the government. It is worth mentioning that recently one of the most popular applications of ICT are decision making decision-support systems, that are designed to facilitate the selection of the "most suitable" candidate or political group, and help citizens to make the best decision concerning their ideas and interests during a referendum [3].

While describing another stage, namely the policy execution, van Dijk highlights that the ICT can not only be used by the government to "detect" crime, e.g. in the Internet, but also the government can use the ICT to request assistance from citizens and ask them to report all kinds of offences and inform about irregularities in the functioning of public institutions using electronic tools, such as websites, special electronic town kiosks, mobile phones etc. Suh snitching forms to secure public order have become increasingly popular, for example *Fix My Street* portal in Britain (http://www.fixmystreet.com/). It can be used to contact relevant institutions and notify them about road damage and request its repair.

As regards e-participation in policy evaluation we may distinguish various activities aimed at providing institutions with feedback regarding the quality of services provided. Special panels (tabs) at websites of those public institutions or automatic forms are used by citizens to express their opinion about a service. Those tools are frequently used by local government institutions and may contribute to continual improvement of service supplied [24].

Jan van Dijk noticed that various forms of e-participation are most frequently used for agenda setting and policy preparation. Policy evaluation is a second area of using electronic tools, mainly through citizen and civic organization initiatives. However, at the stage of actually making a decision and implementing it, the scope of using e-participation seems to be limited most probably due to the fact that the government are unwilling to let citizens participate in the process. It is worth adding that the true test of e-participation in the context of democracy is the influence of e-participation on political decisions. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the use of e-tools and increased engagement of citizens in this particular area is rather scarce [12].

As Sławomira Hajduk [7] notices, J. Ramon Gil-Garcia and Fernando Gonzalez-Miranda define e-participation as citizen engagement in public decisions supported by the use of the Internet [5]. Gil-Garcia and Gonzalez-Miranda distinguish several channels used for e-participation, such as local government blogs, chats with government representatives, and discussion forums [5; 7]. Of course, the range of e-tools of civic participation is longer [24]. Hajduk recalls enumeration made by Dimitris Zissis, Dimitrios Lekkas, Anastasia-Evangelia Papadopoulou [26], who also mention the following tools: webcasts, FAQ, decision-making games, e-panels, e-petitions, e-deliberative polling.

Opportunities created by e-participation tools give hope for counteracting such problems of contemporary democracy as lack of trust in the government, faint interest in politics and low level of active citizenship. On the other hand, however, such solutions are occasionally criticized by the political class in many CEE countries. Despite doubts related to e-tools of civic participation, we

may assume that the practice of using them in a number of countries in the world (Estonia, Switzerland, Norway ect.) will also prompt the inexperienced countries – to develop more interest in such tools, as well as to implement pilot projects and test those solutions

4. Attitudes of Poles towards e-participation tools at the local level

Positive experiences with the implementation and operation of e-voting in Estonia, Switzerland, Norway and other countries, have led to a discussion on new forms of participation in elections in many countries [15]. Also in Poland, at least for the past 10 years, a debate on implementation Internet voting has been conducted before every national election.

The application of information and communication technologies in political decision-making processes in Poland is relatively new phenomenon – we may say that it has been observed for not more than 15 years. The most popular forms of the application of ICT in political field are: electronic social consultations or choosing the projects within the process of participatory budgeting. One may not forget about the use of internet voting in pre-elections before presidential election in Civic Platform party in 2007 [16; 10].

In Poland there is no electronic voting system used in national or local elections. However, there are online social consultation tools such as e-mails and mailing lists, internet groups and forums, internet telephony (e.g. skype) and e-surveys, as well as websites that allow petitions to be submitted or websites designed specifically for social consultations. In addition, special portals are created that allow various institutions to consult many legal acts and other documents defining public policy [13; 17].

It should be stressed, there is no direct legal basis for using a participatory budget [18]. There are no regulations that would oblige the local authorities to co-create the budget project with the participation of residents or consult the final decision with them. However, there is no provision that, prohibits it [22].

It seems that the rapid development of new technologies, which can also be seen in the public domain, translates into a growing awareness among citizens (especially younger generations) of benefits of using the ICT in public services and administration. A growing variety of online services provides citizens with access to broad public services offered over the Internet. Such a provision of services generates measureable benefits for citizens, as well as the public administration. It improves contacts between citizens and public institutions at all levels.

Thus, we may assume that all the above mentioned conditions can influence the openness of the society towards new methods of participation on the local level. It is worth mentioning that citizens in Poland are generally open to the idea of adopting or using new electronic procedures (e-budgeting, e-consultations, e-elections, e-referendums on local level) mostly due to the fact that they are more convenient for them. As this paper focuses on the online variety of electronic tools of civic participation, the findings below are based on the surveys carried out in 2018 (April and May) on a group of 1231 people who made up a representative random sample of adult residents of Poland.

The survey involved 681 women (55.3%) and 550 (44.7%) men. The surveyed were residents of Poland at the age of 18–65+. Surveys varied regarding residence of subjects (443 people (36%) from rural areas, the reminder from cities, of which 185 people (15%) from cities up to 20 thou.

inhabitants, 221 (18%) from cities of 20–100 thou. inhabitants, 123 people (10%) from cities of 100–200 thou. inhabitants and 259 people (21%) from the largest cities above 200 thou. inhabitants), as well as regarding their age: 81 people (6.6%) at the age of 18-24, 212 people (17.2%) at the age of 25-34, 210 (17.1%) at the age of 35-44, 167 people (13.6%) at the age of 44-54, 195 people (15.8%) at the age of 55-64, and 366 people (29.7%) at the age of above 65 lat. The survey also took into consideration education and declared political orientation (right / center / left), which in the opinion of the author could have influenced their opinions regarding the use of electronic participation tools.

A study on the percentage of the respondents who approve having Poland adopt electronic means of local participation found that a total of 72.4% of the respondents either "strongly" or "mildly" favor the solution and that 17.2% oppose the option. In times of very dynamic development of ICT it seems to be something natural that people accept new ways of taking part in politics. In view of rapid advances in IT, widespread Internet access and technological progress in nearly every area of human life, one may presume that voters will want to see innovations also in their participation in public life possibilities to make them more accessible and convenient.

Question	Strongly opposed	Mildly opposed	Undecided	Mildly in favor	Strongly in favor
Do you approve introduction of electronic tools of civic participation in decision-making processes on the local level?	8.4	8.8	10.4	41.3	31.1
Do you approve introduction of the following tools supported by the internet solution?					
participatory e-budgeting	7.9	11.3	14.2	46.8	19.8
e-consultation	6.8	8.2	16.1	38.2	30.7
local e-referendum	11.5	10.1	20.1	36	22.3
local e-elections	14.2	12.8	20.5	30.3	22.2
local e-initiative	12.4	7.5	18.9	35.2	26

Table 1. Percent distribution of responses to the question: "Do you approve introduction of electronic tools of civic participation in decision-making processes on the local level?"
Source: own conclusions based on survey findings.

While analyzing data from table 1 we can see that as many as 72.4% of the surveyed gave positive answer (total answers "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor") to the question about the support of introducing electronic participation tools on the local level.

As regards the introduction of specific electronic tools, the surveyed gave similar answers, with the largest number of people supporting the implementation of e-voting on the citizen budget and electronic public consultations. In the case of a local referendum and local initiative, public support was high, respectively 58.3% and 61.2%. According to the analysis, the introduction of electronic voting for local elections raised major doubts, with only 52.3% of the surveyed supporting the solution. It should be noted that 27% of the surveyed were against the solution (total answers "strongly opposed" and "mildly opposed"). Over 20% of them were uncertain. It seems that "hard" institutional solutions raise major doubts among respondents (contrary to consultations, budget and initiatives which are perceived as more opinion forming tools rather than decision making – as it is with elections). Therefore, we may assume that the surveyed prefer to have consulting tools which do not imply final decision making. This might be the result of lower trust in new electronic tools comparing to traditional ones.

It is also worth drawing attention to the fact that findings of the survey show that in the case of general questions about their support to the introduction of e-participation tools on the local level, the electorate is much more enthusiastic, since 72.4% responded in favor (total "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor"), and 17.2% of surveyed people opposed ("strongly opposed" and „mildly opposed") and 10.4% were undecided. When the same question applies to specific e-participation tools, the survey showed much lower number of those in favor, on average 61.5% (average "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor" for all e-tools) and more people were undecided – 18%.

Considering the ideological inclinations of the surveyed (left/center/right), the author of this paper assumed that citizens with centrist or leftist political orientation are more inclined to use electronic tools of participation. In recent years, politicians of these parties at least on several occasions expressed their support towards e-participation tools, believing that involving in public life via Internet is more comfortable for citizens (particularly for those living abroad) and that it has the potential to improve the level of development of civil society. In addition to that, supporters of centrist and liberal parties are younger and better educated than supporters of other parliamentary parties in Poland.

Considering the results of the survey with respect to the ideological inclinations of the surveyed (left/center/right), it is worth noting three issues that distinguish the respondents and that appear to be of significance:

- firstly, the majority of the respondents across all groups would like to see the option of electronic tools of participation made available on local level – this amounts to 69.6% of the left-wing respondents, 68.5% of the centrist voters, 51.5% of the right-wing respondents, and 61.4% of those who do not define their political views;

- secondly, the most diverse opinions were noted among the respondents who declared themselves to be leftist as well as those defining themselves as rightist. While 68,5% of the former spoke in favor of e-voting, 51.5% of the rightist voters shared their opinion. The difference between the two amounted to 18.1 percentage points. Furthermore, 15.5% of leftist voters expressed a reluctance to having e-tools of participation in Polish local identities. This view was shared by 26.1% of rightist voters (the difference on the issue between the left and right of the political spectrum amounted to 10.6 percentage points);

- thirdly, the smallest divergence in the proportions of responses in favor of e-tools (1.1 percentage points) was between the leftist (69.5%) and the centrists (68.5%). Note that the two groups practically did not differ in the distribution of negative responses, which added up to 15.5% and 15.6% respectively.
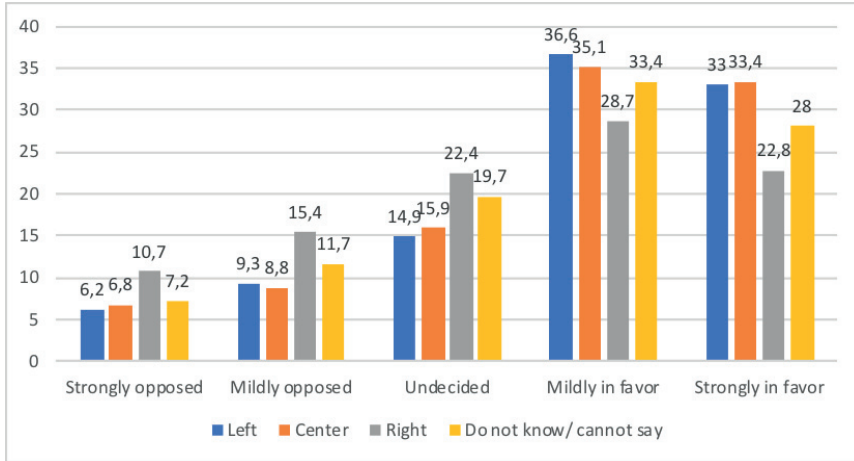
Chart 2. Percent distribution of responses to the question "Do you approve introduction of electronic tools of civic participation in decision-making processes on the local level?" relative to declared political views
Source: own surveys.

Answers to the question about specific solutions provided those are available seem to be very interesting. The analysis of data in table no. 2 shows that a clear majority of respondents were in favor.

In the case of a question about using e-participation tools, as many as 67.4% of the surveyed were in favor (total "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor").

Question	Strongly opposed	Mildly opposed	Undecided	Mildly in favor	Strongly in favor
Given the option, would you use e-tools of participation in decision-making processes on local level?	7.2	10	15.4	36.7	30.7
Given the option, would you use the following e-tools of participation?					
participatory e-budgeting	6.2	12.1	17.9	36.7	27.1
e-consultation	5.8	12.8	17.2	33.6	30.6
local e-referendum	13	14.5	22.4	32.5	17.6
local e-elections	17.8	18.2	23.8	26.2	14
local e-initiative	15.7	12.3	22.1	27.9	22

Table 2. Percent distribution of responses to the question " Given the option, would you use e-tools of participation in decision-making processes on local level?
Source: own conclusions based on survey findings.

As regards the use of specific electronic solutions, the surveyed had similar opinions to those regarding their support to e-tools. The largest number of potential users would use e-consultations and e-citizen budget (respectively 64.2% and 63.8%). In the case of a local referendum and local initiative, public support was relatively high, respectively 50.1% and 49.9%. The fewer potential users are in favor of electronic local elections, since only 40.2% of the surveyed declared their participation in the decision-making process. It should be noted that 36% (total "strongly opposed" and "mildly opposed") of respondents indicated that they would not use electronic voting in local

elections. Nearly 24% of the surveyed remained undecided. Like in the case of the first question, it is clear that "hard" institutional solutions raise major doubts among respondents, and they are reluctant when it comes to declare the use of such solutions. We may assume that the respondents prefer to use consultations rather than decision making. Elections, contrary to consultations, initiatives, and budget, involve more "responsibility" and respondents are wary.

It is also worth mentioning the fact that the findings regarding "general" questions about the use of e-participation tools on the local level, respondents are much more enthusiastic – 67.4% were in favor (total "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor"), whereas 17.2% of people opposed ("strongly opposed" and "mildly opposed") and 15.4% were undecided. When the question refers to more specific e-participation tools, we get fewer supporters – on average 53.56% (average answers "strongly in favor" and "mildly in favor" for all e-tools) and more opponents – 25.7%, and 2.,7% undecided.

Since, according to the analysis, electronic local elections seem to raise major doubts among the surveyed, the further part of the analysis concentrates on e-voting in local elections and analysis covered opinions of the respondents about the use of the solution.

As mentioned above, the largest number of respondents declared that in case of an opportunity to use e-voting in local elections, they would use it. Findings presented in chart 3 show, however, that the society is highly polarized, most probably due to the fact that the respondents are not familiar with e-elections, which makes them wary as regards the use of this form of voting.
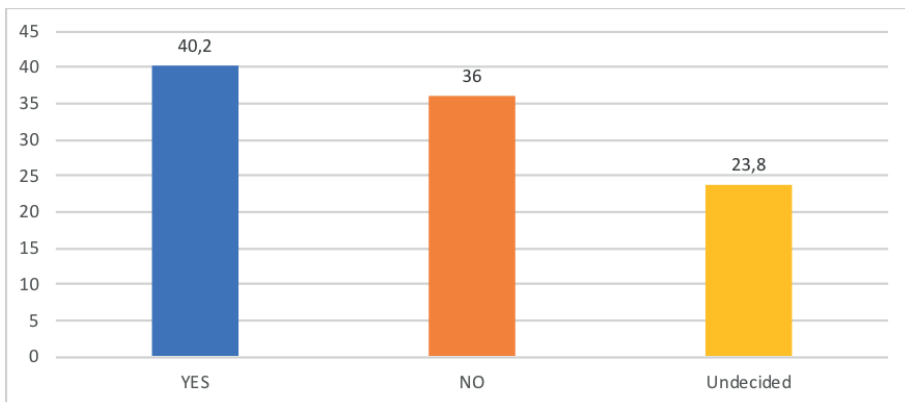
Chart 3. Percent distribution of responses to the question
"Given the option, would you vote over the Internet in local elections?"
Source: own surveys.

Chart 4 show that the female respondents prevail among those who are wary as regards using e-election at the local level. Regarding gender there is no any substantial relationship.
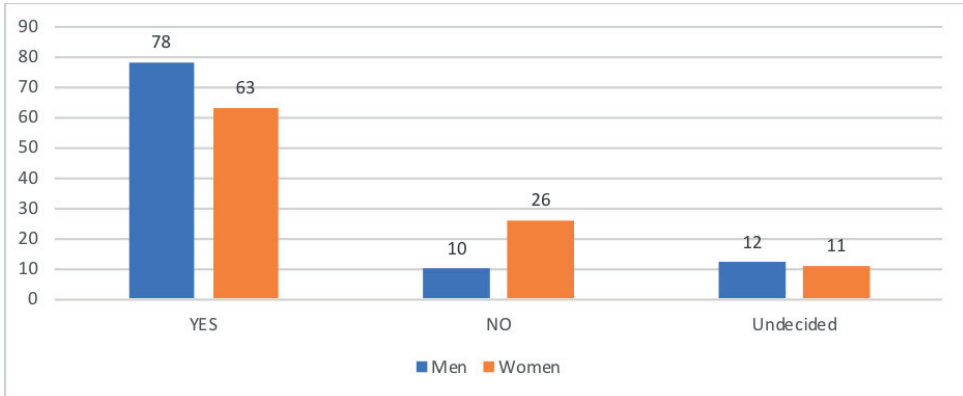
Chart 4. Percent distribution of responses to the question
"Given the option, would you vote over the Internet in local elections?" (relative to sex)
Source: own surveys.

The author of the article assumes that the younger respondents will express higher support for e-voting in comparison to those representing older groups. The youth voters are comfortable with technology and are open to various technological innovations. Thus, they could also choose e voting as a potential way to participate in elections [11]. This opinion is also included in a report "Democracy Rebooted: The Future of Technology in Elections" published by the Atlantic Council, where Conny B. McCormack states that, "…the lives of younger voters are increasingly defined by the digital world, and they will want the elections process to reflect the rest of their lives" [12].

The possibility of engaging youth in the political system using technology seems to be a logical step.
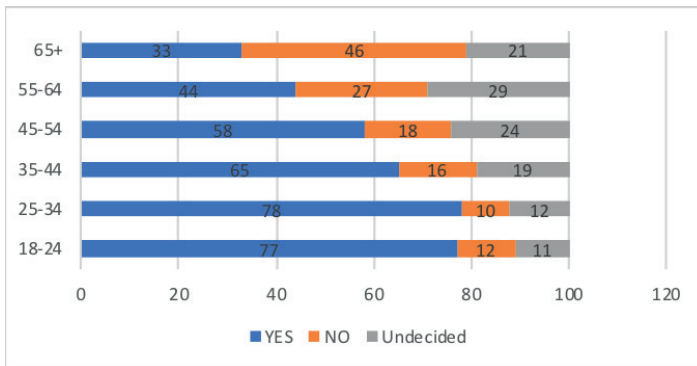

Chart 5. Percent distribution of responses to the question
"Given the option, would you vote over the Internet in local elections?" (relative to age)
Source: own surveys.

Data presented in chart 5 are not surprising, since they show that those in favor of e-voting in local elections are respondents in two youngest groups, namely up to 34 year of age. We can see that the number of respondents who oppose e-voting grows with age. Therefore, we may conclude that groups that are most interested in using e-voting at the local level are citizens up to 54 years of age.

An important determinant of support for e-voting may be the place of residence. I assume that in terms of place of residence the support for e-voting covers largely with the map of political

preferences in Poland. Biggest towns in Poland are much more enthusiastic than the villages. This coincides with the fact that access to the Internet is smaller in rural areas than in more urbanized regions, especially in medium and large cities.

If we take into consideration respondents' place of residence, we can see that electronic voting in local elections is mostly supported by inhabitants of cities (80%), especially large cities, and the largest number of opponents are in rural areas (24%). It is not surprising, since in cities IT infrastructure and skills are much higher than in rural areas.
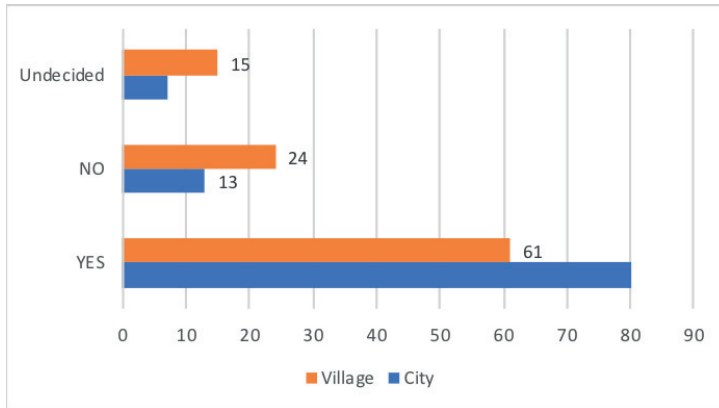

Chart 6. Percent distribution of responses to the question
"Given the option, would you vote over the Internet in local elections?" (relative to place of living)
Source: own surveys.

Education was yet another criterion taken into consideration during the survey. There are opinions that people with higher education, who in many cases live in urban areas - will much more often choose e-voting, which is probably related to their knowledge on the Internet, or more broadly - new technologies. Mihel Solvak and Kristjan Vassil confirm this assumption in their research – they write: "A higher education appeared to be weakly but positively associated with internet voting, though its effect was not consistent" [27].
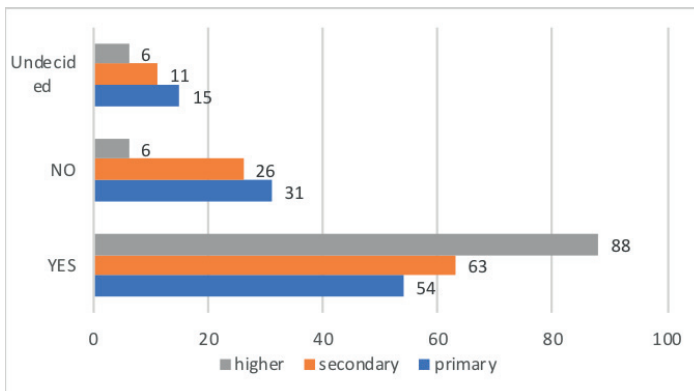

Chart 7. Percent distribution of responses to the question
"Given the option, would you vote over the Internet in local elections?" (relative to education)
Source: own surveys.

Answers to the question about the use of e-voting in local elections show that respondents with higher education are most open to this form of voting.

5. Conclusions

One of the most important issues of the contemporary democracy is the declining political engagement of the electorate. Information and communication technologies seem to be very useful in this particular context, since apart from broader and faster access to information, they create opportunity to "modernize" decision-making end elections procedures and making them more attractive.

Findings presented in the article prove that it is worth to consider the implementation of new participation solutions, since the society is interested in new convenient forms of participation in public life – not only on the local level but certainly also on the state level as well. Answers to all questions related to the implementation of e-participation tools and e-voting itself prove that regardless of the different factors, the opinions of Poles are positive. Interestingly, in Poland there are no measures to implement e-voting as an alternative form of participation in general votes. At the local level, various e-tools solutions are practiced, however, it seems that these measures are still insufficient.

In recent years, the growing popularity of various innovative participation tools has been observed in a number of European countries and elsewhere in the world, including Estonia, Switzerland, United States and Australia. The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) brings new tools, such as the Internet, mobile phones, digital platforms etc. in various field of social life, including politics. Modern technologies complement, expedite and improve three types of activities: provision of information, communication related to a large extend to the participation in a political debate and participation in making political decisions.

The introduction of citizen participation forms based on new technologies has been discussed not only among politicians and IT experts, but also social groups. The latter believe that such solutions not only increase mobility of citizens, but also contribute to simplified procedures and engagement of larger groups of citizens in decision making in cities, municipalities, regions etc.

Despite technical issues of Internet and e-tools security, benefits for various social groups as well as positive experience in many countries may provide a strong incentive to adopt e-tools not only in particular countries in Europe, including Poland, but also in other parts of the world.

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